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World's Fastest Speed Climber

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Hans Florine with Cub Scouts Photo Mark Fenske

Hans Florine is the world's fastest speed climber. This lean and athletic graduate of Campolindo High School is a Moraga local. From the beginning of his 27-year climbing career, Florine aspired to climb the highest cliffs. The problem was he didn't want to carry a monstrous pack full of sleeping gear, food and water. The solution was simple: get up and get down fast. Over the years he's perfected speed climbing. His book, *Speed Climbing*, co-written with Bill Wright, is considered among the top climbing manuals today.

He regaled the bright-eyed Cub Scouts of Pack 54 with stories of his adventures across the globe on Tuesday, March 16th, at Camino Pablo Elementary School. Using videos, pictures and stories, he answered questions and described the courage, preparation and safety precautions it takes to be successful in the climbing world.

Florine has won several speed climbing awards, including the first World Speed Climbing Championship in 1991, and the first three ESPN-X Speed Climbing Games. In August of 2006, Erik Weihenmayer asked his help in climbing the twin summits, Nelion (17,020 feet) and Batain (17,057 feet) of Mt. Kenya. Using Florine's intricate descriptions of terrain, Weihenmayer became the first blind man to reach Mt. Kenya's peaks.

Florine's greatest achievement was less than two years ago, on October 12, 2008. At 44, Florine and partner Yuji Hirayama, 39, scaled the "Nose" of El Capitan in two hours, 37 minutes and 5 seconds. Standing on top of the 2,900-foot-high cliff in Yosemite National Park, they claimed the fastest ascent ever, a record they still hold today.

While 1,500 feet up the "Nose," both Florine and Hirayama had to complete a 100-foot swing from one safe crack in the rock to another. Florine showed video of how he gained momentum with a little flare, doing a 360-degree roll before flying through the air and across the rock face to meet Hirayama. Florine attributed their staggering speed to extensive interviews with previous climbers, as they intricately planned their path up the rock. Practice runs and the support of family and friends also helped them prepare for their astonishing feat.

Florine told the Scouts, "I'm really, really cautious about safety. I'm afraid of heights and that's why I haven't gotten hurt in 27 years. I'm never offended when someone checks my gear for safety." Excited to have broken the speed record for the "Nose," Florine maintains he will not try to break the record until it is broken by someone else.

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